

How Does a Leader Create an Organization of Excellence?

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I use the term “organization of excellence” with my clients. Over many months, they slowly begin to understand what creating one genuinely requires. Saying the phrase is easy; transitioning beyond the existing culture is a lot of work! Old habits are not easy to change.

I suggest leaders learn all they can about encouraging their organizations toward excellence. I have some very strong beliefs about what that entails. I share the basic concepts in this week’s article, and I will expand on those concepts in future weeks.

First, to develop an organization toward excellence requires a conscious commitment to **service**. Individuals in organizations of excellence have a clear understanding of who they serve, and “good enough” is rarely sufficient.

The Bible says to “do your work as unto the Lord.” Some people consider the direction in the Bible to be a constraining set of rules. Not me! I view the Bible as God’s way of letting us know how to best utilize and enjoy His creation. I invite you to consider how God’s commandment to “do your work as unto the Lord” might be His direction for achieving great joy.

I speculate that many employees would say they are paid to serve their bosses. However, employees of organizations of excellence know to whom they provide their service--**customers!**

What about those employees whose work doesn’t put them in direct contact with the “external” customers who ultimately pay everyone’s salary? These employees serve “internal” customers, individuals who use the output of another employee’s work to perform subsequent tasks.

One employee’s finished product is the raw material of the next employee. If the first employee’s work is done poorly, the internal customers can’t do their work properly.

Leaders in every department should pause periodically and ponder with their direct reports who “the customer” is for those working in that area. Further, every employee should seek clarity regarding what that customer needs and what that customer considers excellent quality in the product or service provided. Feedback is abundant in an organization of excellence.

We sometimes can be seduced into believing the customer has no alternative but to obtain that product or service from us, but every customer has choices. What we might consider “good enough,” the external or internal customer might consider inadequate.

Leaders consciously instill in every member of the organization the concept of asking questions to see what can be improved. Many organizations focus on continuous learning as a method for **continuous improvement**. We learn a lot by asking the basic standard questions of “What?”, “How?”, “When?”, “Where?”, “Who?”, and “Why?”

To whom are these questions asked? The internal and external customers, of course. Having a continuously inquisitive orientation to the outcomes and processes of one’s work will periodically expose improvement opportunities. Over time, that develops into a reputation for excellence.

People in organizations of excellence consciously analyze the concept of service, who the customer is (internal and external), what the customer needs and wants, and what the customer considers to be outstanding quality in those products and services.

Further, there is continuous effort to improve, and these improvement efforts come from an orientation of questioning what is currently being done, looking for learnings about whether and how it might be done better.

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